

I am the eye. You are my victim.
The Use of Pornographic Ideology in the Music Videos of Duran Duran
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ABSTRACT: *This paper considers how pornographic ideology and conventions have been reproduced in music video and, therefore, invade mainstream consciousness by analyzing videos of the 1980s popular music group and video pioneers Duran Duran. While it is somewhat easy for anti-pornography activists and scholars to turn to hardcore pornography to argue that those images harm actual women, this paper questions what happens when we cease viewing these images as pornography, defining them as less harmful because they appear in mainstream media.*

Introduction

Andrea Dworkin has said that the first victim in pornography is the woman in the photograph (Dworkin 1994). Using 1980s video icons Duran Duran as an example, I extend her argument to ask what effect that image has on the audience, the female fans who follow popular music groups and consume music videos. By recognizing the pornographic qualities of these images, feminists and other educators will have a way not only to discuss their harm, but also to work to disempower them.

In 1981, MTV was created as a way of delivering the hard-to-reach audience of adolescent white males to its advertisers, but it quickly became a product in and of itself, creating its own "aesthetic" which has been translated into other mediums like advertising, films and commercial television. Researcher Sut Jhally has argued that MTV has crossed over from being merely an avenue for the promotion of products to being a product itself which can communicate meaning and, therefore, ideology to its mass audience (Jhally 1991).

Although essentially mini-commercials for bands and their music, in the hands of devoted fans, music videos are played with like a puzzle, giving glimpses into a world created for the fans and sanctioned by the band. Once the fan has enough interviews, videos, and articles, she can piece together an entire "world" wherein she becomes the woman in the leading role: the woman in the video.

Since the beginning of MTV, images in music videos have borrowed from other mainstream media: photography, film, and theatre. Pornography is one of the "raw materials" borrowed and it cannot be divorced from its meaning in the larger culture. This paper considers how pornographic ideology and conventions have been reproduced in music video and, thus allowed to invade mainstream consciousness. Because pornography harms real women by both its impact and creation of sexual stereotypes, music videos repeat this ideological content and harm by replicating these images.

Redefining Pornography

The feminist analysis of pornography is not about "obscenity" or "sexual explicitness," but is grounded in an image's use of violence against women, degrading poses, objectification of women's bodies (or body parts), and the reduction of women's status to that of sexual object available for the accessibility or conquest by the (male) viewer (Kittay 145-174; Longino 40-54).

By divorcing the definition of pornography from sexual explicitness, feminists have not only moved away from the traditional obscenity approach which is favored by conservative activists who are not

concerned with the status of women, but also inched closer to creating a useful definition which extends to advertising and so-called "soft core" images. By foregrounding the pornographic nature of video images we are able to address their harm, putting them on a continuum with other forms of pornography which feminists are confronting.

As Playboy functions as a way for young men to "learn" about sex, so too has MTV become a way for young women (and men) to do the same. More than merely importing pornographic conventions (poses, camera angles, and so forth), the commodification of sexuality is central to the creation of most music videos. Sexualized representations of women in video partially define for the larger culture, viewers, and popular music fans what sex is. And the "sex" of pornography and music video is the objectification of women, the sexually explicit depiction of women's subordination, and the eroticization of (female) submission and (male) dominance.

According to Luce Irigaray, women live in a society where "selfhood" is defined by other's (namely men's) use of her: her image, her sexuality, her very being. In "The Looking Glass, from the Other Side," Irigaray writes that the image Alice sees in the mirror -- her representation -- is never an honest replication of herself, but one always mutated by external factors (Irigaray 1985). Analyzing the use of women's bodies in music video and educating women about how to read and thus disempower those false representations of ourselves is one way, as Irigaray urges, of "pushing through to the other side," of escaping the male fantasy and commodity system which paralyzes women's sense of self.

Girls on Film: Bits and Pieces

The 1981 video for Duran Duran's first successful American single, "Girls on Film", illustrates the pornographic convention of "bits and pieces", as defined by Annette Kuhn (Kuhn 1985). In this video, the camera continually emphasizes one particular body part of a woman in order to sexualize that "piece" of her. Kuhn argues that such representation is a gesture of dehumanization because one part of the woman is made to stand for the whole person. The model, quite literally, is her breasts, her buttocks, and even her hands or feet -- whatever body part the camera chooses to linger on and sexualize. Even though her entire body might appear in the photo, the woman is not seen as a whole person but a collection of "parts" to be penetrated and (ab)used sexually.



This still-photography convention is enhanced in music video by the use of a moving camera which can lead the viewer's gaze along the woman's body, stopping momentarily on whatever part the director means to emphasize. Not only is this technique a staple of music video, but examples of it can also be found in all of the Duran Duran videos which feature women -- the band members are never dissected by the camera this way unless only their faces are shown.

It is not a coincidence that the pieces of women's bodies emphasized are those which are commonly fetishized in pornography to connote sexuality or sexual difference. "Bits and pieces" reinforces sexual difference and is used to define men and women differently. The band members are



active during the video by virtue of playing their instruments whereas even if the women are shown moving, narrowing in on a part of her leg or her breasts, this action is stopped. The camera dissects her body and subsequently produces a level of passivity not repeated with the men.



Another element of "Girls on Film" is the construction of sexual difference. Before taking their place of prominence at the end of the catwalk – and separated from the action by ropes – the band members appear with the models in the opening sequence of the video. The male band members engage in stereotypically feminine rituals – styling their hair, applying makeup – thereby breaking down the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" behavior.

Once the lyrics begin and the women take to the catwalk, however, sexual difference is quickly established. The band is never fetishized by the camera like the women: the camera never focuses on the lead singer's buttocks or genitals to equate his masculinity with sex. None of the band members even take off a shirt to show some of their flesh.

Got Your Picture: Caught Unawares

In the pornographic convention Kuhn calls "caught unawares," women are depicted without men -- either in a group or by themselves -- and looking away from the camera as if they have been caught by a "peeping tom." Part of the reason that men do not appear in this way in videos is that the spectator of the music video is usually constructed as male. This does not mean, however, that women are not an intended audience for this type of video, but instead all viewers are taught to see these videos through the "male gaze."

One example of the way in which female fans learn male spectatorship lies in Duran Duran's repetition of the video "The Chauffeur" throughout their career. Shot with black and white film and borrowing the style of fashion photographer Helmut Newton, "The Chauffeur" is a male fantasy of a lesbian encounter (Newton 1990). But by citing and repeating this video throughout their 18-year career, Duran Duran tell their fans that this image of women and sex is privileged in their minds. To the average viewer, this may mean nothing, but to a devoted fan, this is a clue as to what the "band" likes and part of the function of video and rock music is to use the clues found there to establish identity. The line of reasoning follows that if "The Chauffeur" is "sex" then a portion of the female fans will accept this definition of "sex" -- i.e., that which is always for the male gaze and enjoyment.

Through the genre of "caught unawares," the male spectator is allowed to remain in control because the woman in the picture can never return his gaze. In fact, women in the videos are rarely empowered to look directly into the camera, to meet its gaze or the gaze of the "viewer" on the other side. The male position as voyeur, therefore, is rarely challenged or rejected. The "caught unawares" convention creates a world in which women are not only available for sexual access and use, but are willing, as well.



Throughout the video, a woman is seen preparing to meet someone. The camera "spies" on her alone in her room as she "dresses" in a bra, stockings complete with a garter belt, and a corset in front of full-length mirrors. These shots are interspersed with scenes of a male chauffeur driving a second woman to meet the first. The chauffeur continually gazes into the rear view mirror, watching his passenger as the camera allows the viewer to observe the first woman "dressing" and preparing to meet the passenger.

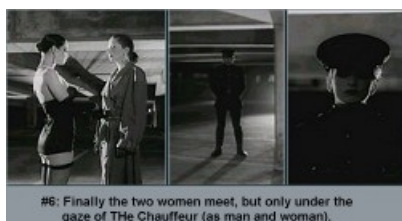
Along with women's inability to challenge the male gaze, these images allow the spectator to watch women in an intimate moment without guilt. Engaged in the action, the women do not notice or pay attention to the viewer eliminating his fear of being caught. She holds no power in this scenario, especially when the "he" is the eye behind the camera. Once viewed, she will always be "caught unawares" and sexually available to him, if only in his mind. This reemphasizes the feminist argument that pornography is the colonization of women for privatized and unlimited sexual access by men.

It is this genre of pornography which produces lesbian scenarios for (mostly) heterosexual viewers. These scenarios are oftentimes stereotypical and, therefore, bring with them another level of harm, that of heterosexist and homophobic assumptions of lesbianism. Although the "caught unawares" convention is supposedly confronting the question of what do women do when they are alone, homophobia precludes any displays of affection between women.

One such example is found in the use of mirrors in the video. Both the chauffeur's passenger and the woman alone in her dressing room possess similarly-shaped pieces of a mirror. As the woman in the room picks hers up, the passenger in the back of the car kisses hers. Even though they later meet, this is the closest they come to physical affection.



Although acting out a lesbian scenario, the women in "The Chauffeur" do not exist for the enjoyment of one another, but for that of the male chauffeur/voyeur. This reinforces Irigaray's argument that in the economy of sexual exchange of women within patriarchy female homosexuality is forbidden or elusive. Irigaray writes, that female homosexuality is, "recognized only to the extent that it is prostituted to man's fantasies. Commodities can only enter into relationships under the watchful eyes of their "guardians" (Irigaray 1985).



And indeed, the women in the video never exist outside the watchful eye of the camera or the male chauffeur. At the end of the video, the male chauffeur drops his passenger off to her "lover" and then steps out of the car. Now the chauffeur and his passenger are on equal terms. She could turn and look at him, meet his gaze and, quite possibly, reject him. But the video sidesteps this fear of rejection by replacing the male chauffeur with a female surrogate. The now-female chauffeur remains until the end of the video, separated from

the lesbian couple, but watching and dancing on her own.

Conclusion

In a recent Duran Duran tour program, I read the phrase – I am the eye, you are my victim. This one phrase sums up the position of women in pornography and music video. Whoever controls the "eye" – whether that is defined as the camera, the gaze, or the image – also controls that which is the "victim" – the subject, the photographer's fetish object, most notably women.

As long as female fans of pop groups are spending hours pouring over video images of what women "should be" by patriarchy's standards and feminists refuse to confront the power of these images because they are defined as popular culture and not significant enough for academic inquiry or activism, then Duran Duran will continue to be the "eye" and the female fan base its "victim." Women's sexuality will continue to be defined by pornographers, video directors, and musicians' images.

Confronting these images whether in an academic or activist setting allows us to begin moving beyond this side of the screen. By opening up the definition of pornography to include mainstream images of women such as those found in music video, we have one way (but certainly not the only way) of assessing harm and responsibility to the images which make up, in many ways, our reality. Now, instead of simply seeing images of women reflected back upon us and accepting the projection found in music video we can teach women to deconstruct and question that image.

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